



SHARPE JAMES
MAYOR
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY
07102

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**** PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL ****

**** M E M O R A N D U M ****

DATE: March 24, 2000

TO: Diane Johnson, Housing and Urban Development
Robert Graham, Executive Director, Newark Housing
Authority
Zinnerford Smith, Executive Director, Newark Watershed
JoAnne Watson, Business Administrator
Calvin West, Mayor's Aide
Cheryl Johnson, Chief of Staff
Al Faiella, Deputy Mayor/Director, Economic and Housing
Development
Johnny Jones, Director of Redevelopment, Development
Pam Goldstein, Communication Manager

FROM: Sharpe James, Mayor 

RE: **BRICK TOWERS**

I hope this matter will be explored under the guise of leadership, objectivity, and truthfulness, divorced of politics and political posturing.

BRICK TOWERS TENANTS LEAGUE
VIRGINIA JONES, PRESIDENT
715 DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., BLVD. # 5A
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY 07102

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MAYOR'S OFFICE

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March 20, 2000

Dianne Johnson, State Coordinator
NEWARK REGIONAL OFFICE
U.S. DEPT. OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
One Newark Center - 13th Floor
Newark, N.J. 07102

By Hand Delivery

RE: BRICK TOWERS RESIDENT PARTICIPATION IN DISPOSITION PROCESS

Dear Ms. Johnson:

I want first to thank you for taking the time to meet to discuss the situation at Brick Towers on Monday March 13, 2000 after the resident and community march, from Brick Towers, and demonstration in front of the HUD Newark office. Other residents present at the meeting were Charlene Jackson of the Brick Towers Tenants League, and Cory Booker, Central Ward Councilman.¹

Before summarizing the respective positions of the residents and HUD as set out at the meeting, I want express our appreciation for your commitment that no final decision has been made with respect to Brick Towers -- and that no final decision can be made before the tenants are consulted. I am sure you would agree that resident consultation, to be meaningful, requires that tenants and their representatives have a genuine opportunity to review and respond to HUD's position. In that light, meaningful participation requires that, in advance of a meeting with you, the tenants be provided with a copy of the Initial Physical Survey, the Comprehensive Project Survey, the Comprehensive Repair Plan and a draft of the Preliminary Disposition Plan as soon as available for review and comment. As we mentioned at the meeting, the residents have retained an independent engineer and having our engineer review the above surveys and plan is crucial to our ability to analyze and provide input on HUD's evaluation of the property.

As we explained at the meeting, Brick Towers residents and their supporters decided to march and rally in front of HUD's offices to clearly communicate the great need -- and our resolve -- to preserve Brick Towers. Brick Towers are our homes and also a badly needed housing resource in a community ravaged by the loss of housing. Because every indication was that a decision by HUD to demolish Brick Towers was in the works -- after years of HUD having failed to correct gross management deficiencies -- we informed you that tenants felt it necessary to publicly express our position. In addition, we advised you that as part of our commitment

¹ Also present at the meeting were Jermaine James, Councilman Booker's assistant, David Weiner, of the Newark Coalition for Low Income Housing, Cesar Torres and Genia Sookram of Essex Newark Legal Services, attorneys for the Brick Towers Tenants League, and Mr. Kaplan from your office.

Dianne Johnson
New Jersey State Coordinator, HUD
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Brick Towers


to save our homes, the tenants have raised funds to pay for an independent engineering study. As Ms. Jackson said, when a disaster occurs anywhere else, the assistance provided is to help people rebuild and remain in their community, not to force people out.

Councilman Booker detailed the huge shortage of affordable housing plaguing the Central Ward and how his ward, and Newark, cannot afford to lose another 300 units. In addition, Mr. Booker detailed the problems faced by tenants vouchered out of other buildings slated for demolition, such as Hill Manor and Hayes Homes, and how the meager low-rise replacement housing, far from a panacea, is beset by very serious problems yet to be addressed. Lastly, we advised you that the HUD appointed property manager had thus far shown itself to be not much different than prior management companies and was interfering with tenants' rights to organize themselves.

In turn, you expressed surprise that the tenants were under the impression that the building would be demolished and the tenants given vouchers. In this regard, you rejected as unauthorized widely disseminated statements made by HUD personnel as to the certain demolition and vouchering of the building. Similarly, you also disavowed similar statements by the HUD Atlanta office in the right of first refusal notice to the City of Newark as not HUD's "official position." You repeatedly assured us that disposition of Brick Towers was your decision to make and that no decision had yet been made. Moreover, you assured us that no decision would be made until a full study was completed and a disposition plan written, all in compliance with the disposition regulations set forth at 24 C.F.R. 290. You also stated that after a preliminary plan was written there would be a meeting with the tenants before a final decision was made. Lastly, you expressed a willingness to personally make sure that the relationship between the present property manager and the tenants improves as well as directing Patrick Morris, the HUD Community Builder to make himself available to the residents.

At your earliest convenience, kindly confirm that your offices will provide us with copies of the various plans requested above as soon as they are available. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and for your commitment to meaningful tenant input into the Brick Towers disposition decision.

Yours truly,



Virginia Jones, President

cc: Hon. Sharpe James, Mayor
Cory Booker, Councilman Central Ward
David Weiner, Newark Coalition Low Income Housing
Frank Hutchins, Greater Newark HUD Tenants Coalition
Harris David, Legal Services of New Jersey
César E. Torres, Essex-Newark Legal Services